

Education for Sanctity

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Towering walls of prejudice have been erected against the use of the words of this title in a single phrase because they have been incorrectly assumed to be antithetical in content, antagonistic in purpose. In the most extreme form, this prejudiced notion could be stated as holding that an educated person could have little tolerance for any concept of sanctity and that a righteous person should feel no great need for an education, except for purely utilitarian or economic ends.

Before examining the possibility of establishing a more friendly relationship between these words, definitions are in order. "Education: discipline of mind or character through study or instruction." "Sanctity: holiness of life and character." These terse descriptions open the door to a proper investigation of the problem, "Is it possible or feasible so to discipline mind or character through study or instruction as to facilitate the attainment of holiness of life and character?" Altogether irrelevant is the question some would like to make of this, "Can education be a substitute for traditional evangelistic processes in the attainment of holiness of life and conduct?" The writer would make it immediately clear that he raises no question as to the validity of the evangelistic approach to sanctity, but would suggest the possibility of making educative processes allies rather than foes of this approach.

Protagonists of experiential sanctity hold that moral transformation is the work of divine grace, while education is a human device for the redirection and restructuring of life patterns. If God is to make man, in this life, holy, He does so with a direct work, redemptive in nature, that needs no human intervention or assistance. The latter, indeed, may interfere with a divine operation. Those holding this view have no difficulty in

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believing that God uses preaching, praying, singing, and personal work to attain His ends. This paper merely raises the question as to the suitability of using instructional procedures to achieve the goals of One who sent to this world its greatest Teacher, who in turn instructed His disciples to "Go . . . teach!"

Those who hold the doctrine of entire sanctification in reverent regard do so against the backdrop of long held and jealously protected convictions that are probably, in the revealing light of unprejudiced scrutiny, more properly classified as presuppositions. Since these are held with such devout sincerity, they are presented only factually, without editorializing. The writer is certain of their authenticity, for having identified himself with the holiness movement and people for over forty-five years, he confesses to having himself—at various times—entertained all of these ideas, holding even now that each has elements of validity. Because they are presented objectively, it is hoped that the reader will generously absolve the writer from any charge of indulging in either levity or sacrilege. He consciously walks on holy ground.

1. Holiness is caught, rather than taught. Having its origin in God, it is not attained by any human device of instruction.
2. Holiness is experiential, rather than behavioral, though logically a higher level of *being*, effected by a divine work, should result in a higher plane of *doing*.
3. An individual cannot be educated into holiness. The port of entry is a crisis—absolute, unconditional consecration and accepting faith rather than learning, which is a continuing life process.
4. A right relationship with God automatically produces good relationships with man.
5. Emotional difficulties and ethical perplexities should be treated as spiritual problems which will be resolved when a person has a pure heart and a Spirit-filled life.

If these propositions constitute the entire relationship between education and sanctity, then other than instructional approaches are in order and preaching/proclamation will and should continue to be the principal instrument for the propagation of the doctrine.

There are other possibilities, however. On these must rest the case for a contribution to sanctity through education. A series of counter-propositions is suggested:

1. If there are facts a regenerated person should know that might lead him to desire a holy heart,
2. If holiness is a process as well as—not instead of—a crisis,

3. If there are personal problems of an emotional, devotional or disciplinary nature that emerge, even in the lives of the purified,
4. If there are interpersonal relationships that need to be refined and improved after a person has been cleansed, and
5. If knowledge of God's word, working and way are important to spiritual growth and maturity, then sanctity and education are not antithetical but complementary and interdependent. Without elaborating extensively on these, some amplification is in order to test the hypothesis that an educative process can and should contribute to the understanding and attainment of sanctity.

1. *Needed facts.* The controversy will probably never be fully resolved as to whether the attainment of sanctity should be presented as an obligation or a privilege. Hebrews 12:14 makes heart purity a firm requirement for fellowship with the Lord. The promise of Christ identifies the coming of the Holy Spirit with the reception of power. Certain creedal emphases accent guidance, knowledge and stability. An accompanying Presence is promised.

Due to widely manifested differences between individuals, the motives activating the quest for personal holiness necessarily vary. Preaching tends to be patternized—some denunciatory, other emotional, hortatory, analytical, historical, exegetical or expository. Teaching is more likely to be objective, thorough and learner-centered. The biblical facts are not in themselves sanctifying, but they can be so presented as to provide answers to known human needs for righteousness, both awakening desire and impelling action to seek and find God's purifying work within the heart and life. Some believers are almost completely disinterested in a single though traumatic experience because their desire lies in the direction of continuing stability in personal holiness reflected in acts and attitudes. Others do desire a quick and epochal change that will resolve all their spiritual problems. A diligent, directed study of the Bible is probably the best way to show that vital sanctity inheres in both types of desire and their fulfillment in the purifying provisions of Christ's atoning work.

2. *Process vs. crisis.* Those who believe in the unconditional security of a Christian believer, who hold that spiritual rebirth is an irreversible act and that adoption is an undissolvable relationship are committed to an evangelistic strategy, to wit, by almost any device getting a seeker to an altar, enquiry room or other place of commitment. What happens thereafter is of secondary moment.

In the same spirit, there are those who hold sanctity to be the pro-

duct of one supremely meaningful moment in which a person, having met God's conditions of absolute and unconditional surrender to His will by "dying out" to self and sin, accepts by faith God's promise, provisions, and purity, becoming holy in heart. If this be all there is to sanctity, procedures are inescapably clear. Candidates for the divine work must be influenced by some logical, emotional or social appeal to quickly find a time and place for complete yielding to the known will of God, that His empowering, cleansing Presence in the person of the Holy Spirit may fill the heart, life and personality. Instruction may have some, but relatively little, part to play in assisting the seeker, because of findings that action is far more strongly influenced by feelings than by facts.

If there be force to the Pauline phrase, "perfecting holiness," so that experience, however memorable, is only a port of entry into a life of infinitely enlarged dimensions, the role of education suddenly assumes new importance. The camp meeting and revival do not become less significant, for they should provide a steady stream of unfinished material for producing convincing Christians, the most needed witnesses in the world. The complete and mature example of Christian sanctity is the product of time, patience, effort, work and study. The part learning plays is too obvious to call for detailed treatment. As Paul points out in II Timothy 2:15, the obtainment of divine approval rests rather on study than ecstatic experience. While many pastors and evangelists insist that every time they preach they also teach, every educator knows that no real learning takes place without study. Otherwise the educative process is intrinsically incomplete.

3. *Personal problems.* "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." The saint is not exempt from the many pressures that beset all people. He has to get along with his family, friends, and those with whom he works. He knows hunger, fatigue and disappointment. The words of the Savior, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee . . . but ye would not," intimate that grief, discouragement and frustration may co-exist with personal sanctity of the highest order. Habits formed over the years are not in every case broken in a moment. Recognizing these facts, both Testaments devote extended passages to providing information that will assist the believer in attaining spiritual maturity in his life. One of the most perplexing problems faced by those seeking to be holy is the misleading inference that when they become sanctified, they will attain such complete deliverance from all perplexities and limitations that life will be unendingly or uninterruptedly blissful in its spiritual dimension. Reality proves so different that confidence in God's plan or their response thereto becomes seriously undermined. They simply stop trying to either confess or possess personal holiness, relapsing into mediocrity at best or actual

sin at worst. A careful study of the life of sanctity, its demands and difficulties would obviate the situation, leading to a more realistic concept of the way of holiness which leads to a satisfying and useful stability.

The emancipating power of truth gives promise of lowering the casualty rates caused by anticipations and expectations that, generalized from individual experiences, are unsupported by divine provisions and promises, but which have resulted in disillusionment, disappointment and cynicism when unobserved in conduct or unfelt in experience. There is probably no better safeguard against the erosion of hope and faith than exact knowledge of the divine pattern and plan for personal holiness. Such knowledge is not picked up by casual exposure to assorted testimonies or even preaching that is strongly influenced by highly subjective factors, but by accurate instruction from the word of God. The most spiritually dependable people are those who are most highly and scripturally literate. Knowledgability at this level is a most convincing argument for education for the sanctified.

4. *Interpersonal relationships.* No one known to the writer has contrived a final answer to the puzzle of tensions and even enmities between saints. It will be remembered that Paul and Peter had pointed differences. Some differences are the fruit of conflicting loyalties which only accentuate the divisive nature of the consequences. A pastor, commenting on a critical situation in his parish, noted the incongruity of the same lips producing virtuous pronouncements and vituperative praying.

The history of Christianity is stained with blood and its pathway littered with the debris of broken friendships and damaged reputations. The convictions responsible for the wreckage were most sincerely held, but this makes the horror greater, less excusable. There is obviously no simple answer to this phase of the human predicament, no course to be studied—even in the Bible—that offers a cure-all, but improvement is promised, if not guaranteed, by better, clearer communications. People need to be educated in ways of cleaning out channels clogged by prejudice and self-esteem, so they can talk to each other, thereby gaining fresh perspective and sympathetic insight.

5. *Growth and maturity.* Paul wrote of his daily death. New experiences, influences, problems and associations call for new solutions and new submission as a continuing experience. All necessary knowledge for successfully living the rest of life simply does not come in a flash of insight at the moment of purification. The most spiritually advanced Christians testify to their daily recurring need of careful and reverent exposure to God's word. Those who know it best love it most. It is unfortunate that in many holiness circles the idea is popular that sanctity can be most effectively preserved by maximum exposure to preaching and

minimum devotion to Bible study. Since so much preaching accepted as relevant to contemporary needs is topical and problem-centered, the above notion ought to be reversed. This is not to be interpreted as an argument for abandoning the preaching hour, but rather a plea for upgrading, enriching and supporting the one devoted to study. Study, in turn, deserves the techniques and status of a truly educative experience with sound pedagogy and planned, individual examination of the Bible.

Whenever the contributing influence of education on genuine piety is recognized and applied, sanctity is translated from the lofty realm of the unrealizable ideal to the practical and rewarding level of behavioral holiness accurately described in the Bible as the attainable end of Christ's redemptive work. It is not a forced conclusion but an inevitable finding that education is not only helpful in attaining and applying sanctity, but is indispensable as an instrument for arriving at the higher plateaus of Christian experience where one may revel in the fullness of the divine presence and at the same time reach out and down in creative service, true fulfillment of the redemptive mission.